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Another FAA Short-term Extension In the Works *Multi-Year Bills May Get to the Floor in June*

Given that it is now mid-May, that the current Federal Aviation Administration authorization expires May 31, and that several issues of conflict remain on long-term reauthorization legislation, the Congress appears set to provide yet another short-term extension of funding authority for FAA programs. The House and Senate leadership has agreed to extend FAA program authority through August 6. The extension language is included in the supplemental spending bill for disaster relief and military support in Kosovo now before the Congress.

Congressional leaders in both houses have said that their next priority for scheduling is consideration of the 13 annual appropriations bills. It now looks like the House and Senate will not begin floor debate on either H.R. 1000 or S. 82, the two versions of a multi-year FAA reauthorization bill, until June or perhaps even later in the year.

House Committee Works to Bring AIR 21 to the Floor. The House version of the FAA authorization bill has not yet been reported to the floor for consideration, although the full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved the measure early this year. The members are deciding whether to send the bill to the

floor with its original language to take the Aviation Trust Fund off-budget or to plan substitute language that instead uses a new budgetary mechanism to still guarantee higher spending for FAA programs. The goal, according to committee staff, is to lock in higher spending levels while giving appropriators flexibility on where to spend those funds within the FAA budget.

In an effort to make the bill comply with the recently-passed budget deal, the committee is considering cutting the overall guaranteed funding for the Airport Improvement Program from \$5 billion annually to about \$4.1 billion. The \$4.1 billion each year would be protected by a "firewall" similar to that provided for highway and transit funds in TEA 21. The remaining \$900 million in annual funding might be subject to appropriations.

Committee Chairman **Bud Shuster** (R – Pennsylvania) now plans to have the bill come up for House floor consideration the week of June 14, in an effort to get action on the FAA authorization bill soon, preferably before House appropriators bring the FY 2000 transportation appropriations measure to the floor.

For their part, appropriators are still suspicious of the committee's efforts. They say that they have not been involved yet in

discussions on the budgetary mechanism. In the meantime, the appropriators are moving forward with their FY 2000 spending bill for transportation.

Appropriators may use the FY 2000 transportation appropriations bill to establish their own priorities. The FY 2000 appropriations bill will likely contain project earmarks and special provisions requested by members. The transportation spending measure is slotted for markup in the transportation appropriations subcommittee the week of June 15.

Senate Bill Is Also Caught Up in Negotiations. Senate Commerce Committee Chairman **John McCain**

(R – Arizona) told reporters this week that he has made little progress in reaching a deal with other senators that would permit S. 82 to come to the Senate floor. McCain is trying to negotiate on the amendments that senators could offer to the legislation. He indicated that the bill's provisions for landing slots at Washington Reagan National Airport and Chicago's O'Hare Airport remain controversial with certain senators.

Congressional leaders hope to have the supplemental spending bill, with its short-term FAA extension language, adopted by both houses of Congress this week.



The *Federal Flyer* is a publication of the TxDOT Legislative Affairs Office. It is intended to provide up-to-date information on major legislative activities in the 106th Congress for the management of the Texas Department of Transportation, state leaders, and others interested in Texas transportation issues. This report will also feature key activities in the national transportation community. Sources include news services and staff reports.

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